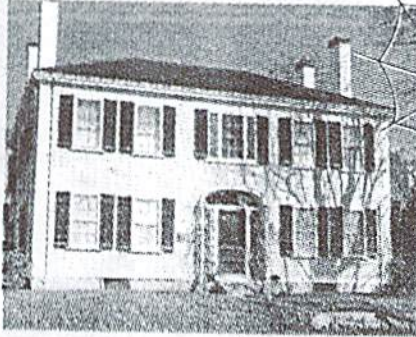


Wednesday, October 29, 2008

Duxbury Clipper

# Duxbury's most haunted places

The King Caesar House is the source of many local ghost stories. Members of the Weston family met grim deaths inside the house. There are rumors of lights turning on by themselves and eerie shrieks recorded on tape.



By JUSTIN GRAEBER, CLIPPER EDITOR  
JUSTIN@DUXBURYCLIPPER.COM

Duxbury is a town with a rich and storied history. But a town as old as Duxbury isn't without its share of ghosts. From strange noises to ethereal apparitions, this town has a number of haunted sites and creepy stories of curses. Here are just a few, courtesy of Duxbury Rural and Historical Society Executive Director Patrick Browne, who shared some of his favorite ghost stories during a lecture at the King Caesar House Saturday afternoon.

continued on page 6

# Duxbury's most haunted places

continued from page one

## John Alden the Warlock

The Salem Witch Trials is one of the more embarrassing episodes in this history of Massachusetts. Caught experimenting in fortune telling, a group of teenaged girls tried to save their own skins by saying they were unduly influenced by local citizens who were, in fact, witches.

"These girls started feeling pretty powerful," said Browne. "They started accusing more and more people."

Eventually their reach stretched all the way to Duxbury.

John Alden (not the Pilgrim, but his son) was one of the richest men in Boston in 1692. The girls from Salem accused him of being a warlock, or a male witch, on May 28.

"There is not a word of truth in all that they say of John Alden," he wrote of his own trial.

One of Alden's friends was the constable in Boston, and was able to get him released from jail. Alden rode straight to his home in Duxbury, and burst through the doors of his family's house, screaming that "the devil was after him."

"Of course, that scared the heck out of his family," said Browne.

Alden's family hid him in Duxbury until the furor over the witch trials died down, and Alden was eventually able to get a fair trial and was acquitted of witchcraft.

## The Tree of Knowledge.

For many years, on the corner of Elm and Summer streets stood a giant tree called the Tree of Knowledge. What is now Route 53 was once an important road between Boston and Plymouth, highly traveled by stagecoach.

In the 1800s, stagecoaches traveling this road were reluctant to take the detour into Duxbury Village to drop off mail. To save time, they often left mail for Duxbury residents at the tree. Over time, the tree

On those two days, it's said that the ghosts of Civil War veterans return to Mayflower Cemetery to fire a spectral salute.



became known as the "Tree of Knowledge" because it's where Duxbury residents gathered for news of friends and relatives.

The tree eventually became old and started to decay. Towards the end of its life, an old man who lived near the tree had a dream where the tree came alive and spoke to him.

"I have been an important part of your community," the tree said. "After I'm dead, you had better mark this place with a sign."

If a sign wasn't created, the tree said it would place a curse upon the whole town. Needless to say, residents built a sign for the site sometime between 1820 and 1840.

"Since that time there has always been a sign at the Tree of Knowledge Corner," said Browne.

In 1937, the town took down the wooden sign to replace it with a more permanent stone marker. While the work was being done, however, there was no sign.

"Everybody in the neighborhood was pretty nervous for those two months," said Browne.

## The ghost portrait of Florence Wright.

The Wright family was one of the richest in Duxbury. They lived in a mansion known as Pine Hill, located where the high school is now.

The Wrights built the town's first library, in what's now called the Wright Building. The Duxbury Rural and Historical Society has its archives in the building.

"When we started to take over the building, I wanted to know everything there is to know about the Wrights," said Browne.

As he collected family portraits, he stumbled upon the story of Florence Wright.

Florence Wright's portrait was given to a distant cousin in Virginia. The cousin was told the portrait was a vivid color pastel.

"When they got it, it was a black and white charcoal," said Browne.

Confused, the relatives hung the portrait in their library. Soon, they started hearing voices and footsteps they couldn't explain.

One day, the rose Florence Wright was holding in her portrait turned red.

"Every time they came back into the library, there was a little more color in the portrait," said Browne.

There's no explanation as to why the portrait may have changed colors, said Browne. Perhaps Florence was angry at being taken from her home.



but eventually softened her outlook.

The painting is now in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C.

### Mayflower Cemetery

The last Duxbury Civil War veteran died in 1936. But that war left an important mark in the town's history.

During the Civil War, Duxbury's population was only about 2,000. Two hundred men, about 10 percent of the town, went to fight, most with either the 38th Massachusetts regiment or the 18th Mass.

Those two regiments were involved in some of the bloodiest conflicts of the war. The 18th Massachusetts was involved in the Second Battle of Bull Run on Aug. 30, 1862, and the 38th was involved in the battle of Port Hudson, Louisiana, on June 14, 1863.

"They suffered a lot of casualties," said Browne. "A lot of Duxbury men died."

On those two days, it's said that the ghosts of Civil War veterans return to Mayflower Cemetery to fire a spectral salute.

### Haunted Sun Tavern

One of Duxbury's most enduring ghost stories involves the Sun Tavern on Route 14.

"There's a lot of strange things that go on there, especially with lights," said Browne.

Sometimes, the staff at the tavern will report turning off all the lights at the close of business, and blowing out all the candles, only to see a single candle re-ignite.

During the 1980s, Duxbury Police responded to a burglar alarm at the tavern. After checking things out, the police went to leave the building. Suddenly, the sound of footsteps running through the house could be heard.

"The police left the Sun Tavern that night absolutely believing in ghosts," Browne said.

Who is the ghost that haunted the restaurant? Some believe it's Lysander Walker, an eccentric hermit who once lived on the property. Walker shot himself in the early 1930s.

Walker's portrait hangs in the building, but it was found in two parts. The frame was found in the attic, but the can-

vas itself was found plastered into the ceiling. Who might have wanted to hide the painting?

### King Caesar House

The King Caesar house is home to a host of Duxbury's ghost stories. The house belonged to shipbuilding baron Ezra Weston, called "King Caesar" because of his enormous wealth and stature. Many family members died under mysterious circumstances. Weston himself starved to death, and his wife and two sons died in the house.

There are rumors of a secret tunnel running from the house to the shore, although Browne said these likely stem from an old ice cellar that is now filled in.

"I don't believe anything more interesting than ice was kept there," he said.

However, since Browne first came to Duxbury 10 years ago, he has been hearing stories about the King Caesar House.

For example, there's a rope tied to the attic door, supposedly to "keep the ghost in." (Browne hasn't bothered to test that theory, although he's skeptical of ghosts in general.)

### DO YOU HAVE A GHOST STORY TO SHARE?

These are some favorites, but certainly aren't the only ghoulish tales about our hometown. Send your spooky stories to [editor@duxburyclipper.com](mailto:editor@duxburyclipper.com)!

But there have been strange things at the house, including lights turning on by themselves, and Christmas decorations shattering before his very eyes.

During one tour of the house, given by Browne, someone asked if they could record the tour. Browne didn't think much of it until the next day, when he got a panicked phone call.

"She called me the next day completely freaked out," he said. "She said you have to come up and hear this."

The woman played a section of the tape back. During the tour, someone had reached out to touch a china display, and had been reprimanded by a fellow tourist. But on the tape, after a woman's voice says "you shouldn't touch that," a ghastly shriek is heard.

Is it a ghost? Who knows for sure. Browne, for his part, isn't convinced, although he admits there are some stories of Duxbury he can't explain. One thing is for sure, Duxbury holds its share of spooky stories, in shadows of some of its most historic buildings.

"I have been an important part of your community," the tree said. "After I'm dead, you had better mark this place with a sign."

